

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEPCHAS AND SIKKIM

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THE Lepchas¹ are a Mongoloid people living in the Himalayas on the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kinchenjunga. It seems certain that they were originally the only inhabitants of this large tract of mountainous land, but during the last three centuries, or possibly longer, their land has been taken from them by conquering invaders, the Tibetans, the Nepali, and finally the English. At the time of the 1931 census the 25,780 registered Lepchas were almost evenly divided between the Native State of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of British India, 13,000 being in Sikkim and the rest in Darjeeling, with the exception of 66 who were employed, chiefly as gardeners, in Calcutta. [131] [144] [175]

There is no generally accepted theory among those anthropologists who believe that every tribe originally came from somewhere else as to the place of origin of the Lepchas. Various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialect spoken in Indo-China. The Lepchas themselves have no tradition of migration and place the home of their ancestors—the people of Mayel—in one of the inaccessible valleys of Kinchenjunga. [174]

The Lepchas do not appear ever to have resisted invasion of their own accord. Sikkim was apparently colonised by the Tibetans at some date prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century.² [175]

¹ The Lepchas do not call themselves Lepchas; they call themselves *Rong*. 'Lepcha' is said to be a derogatory Nepali term—*lap-cha*—meaning, though the philology is doubtful, 'nonsense talkers.' A parallel could be found in the Russian name for Germans—*nametski*, which means 'the dumb ones.' Since all books dealing with the people and district refer to the Lepchas as Lepchas, it would seem merely pedantic and confusing to use the term *Rong*. The word would appear to have no other significance in Lepcha. [107]

² I take the suggestion that Sikkim (which at that date included the present Darjeeling district) was colonised or at least dominated by the Tibetans before the beginning of the seventeenth century from *An Account of Tibet* by the

CHAPTER 2

HIMALAYAN HOTCH-POTCH: AN ANTHOLOGY OF SIKKIM

The country.

"SIKKIM—Native State in the Eastern Himalayas, 131 ●
with an area of 2,818 square miles. It is bounded
on the north and east by Tibet; on the south-east by
Bhutan; and on the south by Darjeeling District; and on the
west by Nepal. The Tibetan name for Sikkim is pronounced
Denjong, and more rarely Demjong or Demoshong; and the
people are called *Rong-pa*, or 'dwellers in the valleys,' the
term *Mom-pa*, or 'dwellers in the low country,' being used
occasionally to describe the Lepcha inhabitants."

Gazetteer of India, Vol. 22. 1908.

The climate.

"The climate varies between the tropical heat of the valleys 132
and the Alpine cold of the snowy ranges. The rainfall is very
heavy, averaging 137 inches annually at Gangtok. From
November to February the rainfall is light, and the weather
in November and December is clear and fine. In March
thunderstorms commence and, growing more and more
frequent, usher in the rainy season, which lasts till October."

Ibid.

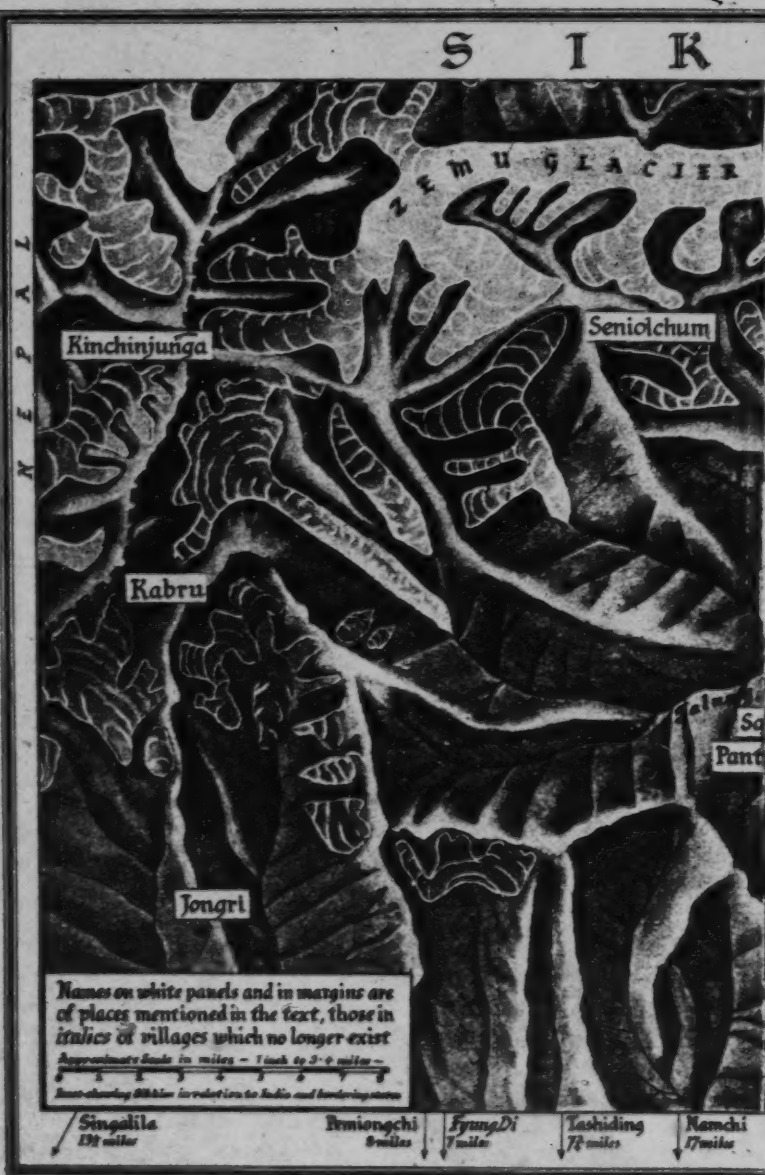
Encouragement for the timid traveller.

"Even in the most remote regions of Sikkim one's personal 574
safety is assured, for the inhabitants are a peaceful and 609
hospitable folk, and on this point even the most nervous need
have no fear. Ladies travelling by themselves may undertake
expeditions to the furthestmost bungalows, without being
subjected to the least inconvenience, their *sirdar* or headman 622
always regarding their protection as his own personal charge.

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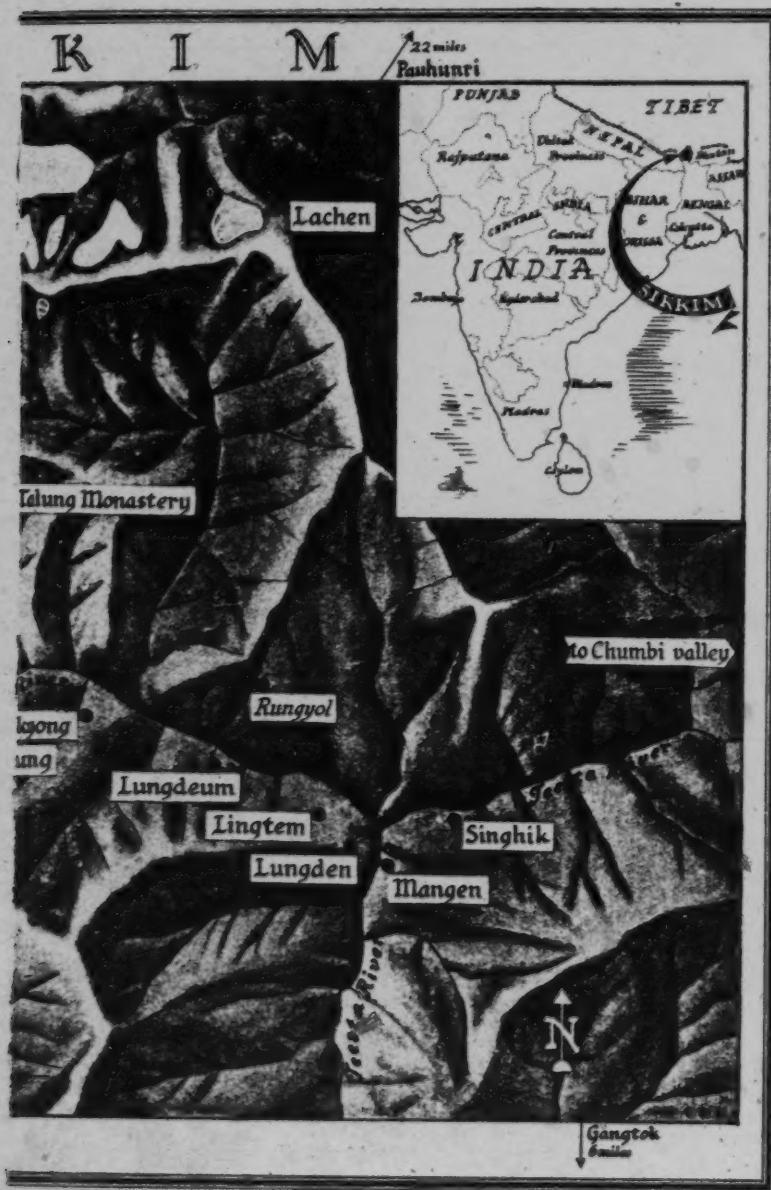
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[end map (A)]

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[end map (B)]

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[757] generous disposition, keep the wallet of the Bijooa always full.

● 131 Such are some of the prominent features of this people,
181 who inhabit the sub-Himalayas, between the Nepalese and Bhotan frontiers, at elevations of 3000 to 6000 feet. In their relations with us, they are conspicuous for their honesty, their power as carriers and mountaineers, and their
[342] skill as woodsmen; for they build a waterproof house with a thatch of banana leaves in the lower, or of bamboo in the elevated regions, and equip it with a table and bedsteads for three persons, in an hour, using no implement but their heavy knife. Kindness and good humour soon attach them to your person and service. A gloomy-tempered or morose master they avoid, an unkind one they flee. If they serve a good hills-man like themselves, they will follow him with alacrity, sleep on the cold, bleak mountain exposed to the pitiless rain, without a murmur, lay down the heavy burden to carry their master over a stream, or give him a helping hand up a rock or precipice—do anything, in short, but encounter a foe, for I believe the Lepcha to be a veritable coward.* It is well, perhaps, he is so: for if a race, numerically so weak, were to embroil itself by resenting the injuries of the warlike Ghorkas, or dark Bhotanese, the folly would soon lead to destruction.

131 Before leaving the Lepchas, it may be worth mentioning
144 that the northern parts of the country, towards the Tibet
181 frontier, are inhabited by Sikkim Bhoteas † (or Kumpas),

* Yet, during the Ghorka war, they displayed many instances of courage: when so hard pressed, however, that there was little choice of evils.

† Bhote is the general name for Tibet (not Bhotan), and Kumpa is a large province, or district, in that country. The Bhotanese, natives of Bhotan, or of the Dhurma country, are called Dhurma people, in allusion to their spiritual chief, the Dhurma Rajah. They are a darker and more powerful race, rude, turbulent, and Tibetan in language and religion, with the worst features of those people exaggerated. The various races of Nepal are too numerous to be alluded

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

APRIL, 1848.

LIMBOOS, ORIGIN AND CUSTOMS.

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a mixed race calling themselves Kumpa Rong, or Kumpa Lepchas; but they are emigrants from Tibet, having come with the first rajah of Sikkim. These people are more turbulent and bolder than the Lepchas, and retain much of their Tibetan character, and even of that of the very province from which they came; which is north-east of Lhassa, and inhabited by robbers. All the accounts I have received of it agree with those given by MM. Huc and Gabet.

Next to the Lepchas, the most numerous tribe in Sikkim is that of the Limboos (called "Chung" by the Lepchas); they abound also in East Nepal, which they once ruled, inhabiting elevations from 2000 feet to 5000 feet. They are Boodhists, and though not divided into castes, belong to several tribes. All consider themselves as the earliest inhabitants of the Tambur Valley, though they have a tradition of having originally emigrated from Tibet, which their Tartar countenance confirms. They are more slender and sinewy than the Lepchas, and neither plait their hair nor wear ornaments; instead of the ban they use the Nepal curved knife, called "cookree," while for the striped kirtle of the Lepcha are substituted loose cotton trousers and a tight jacket; a sash is worn round the middle, and on the head a small cotton cap. When they ruled over East Nepal, their system was feudal; and on their uniting against the Nepalese, they were with difficulty dislodged from their strongholds. They are said to be equally brave and cruel in battle, putting the old and weak to the sword,

to here: they are all described in various papers by Mr. Hodgson, in the "Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal." The Dhurma people are numerous at Dorjiling; they are often runaways, but invariably prove more industrious settlers than the Lepchas. In the Himalaya the name Bhotan is unknown amongst the Tibetans; it signifies literally (according to Mr. Hodgson) the end of Bhot, or Tibet, being the eastern extreme of that country. The Lepchas designate Bhotan as Ayeu, or Aieu, as do often the Bhotanese themselves. Sikkim, again, is called Lhop, or Lho', by the Lepchas and Bhotanese.